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# NASA Procedural Requirements

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## Subject: Reduction in Force

**Responsible Office: Office of Human Capital Management**[| TOC](#) | [Preface](#) | [Chapter1](#) | [Chapter2](#) | [Chapter3](#) | [ALL](#)

## Chapter 2. Reduction-in-Force (RIF) for Non-Senior Executive Service Positions

### 2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Competing employee means an employee in Tenure Group I, II, or III.

2.1.2 Performance rating means the written, or otherwise recorded, appraisal of performance compared to the performance standards for each critical and non-critical element on which there has been an opportunity to perform for the minimum period. A performance rating may include the assignment of a summary level within a pattern.

2.1.3 Retention standing means the relative position or standing of an employee in their competitive level based on an employee's tenure of employment (Tenure Group), veterans preference, length of service and performance.

2.1.4 Subgroups are the divisions of a Tenure Group based on employees' veterans preference.

2.1.5 Tenure Group I includes career employees who are not serving a probationary period for initial appointment to the competitive service. Employees serving supervisory or managerial probationary periods are otherwise eligible to be included in this group.\*

2.1.6 Tenure Group II includes career-conditional employees, employees serving a probationary period for initial appointment to the competitive service. Employees serving supervisory or managerial probationary periods are otherwise eligible to be included in this group.\*

2.1.7 Tenure Group III includes employees serving under indefinite appointments, temporary appointments pending establishment of a register, status quo appointments, term appointments and provisional appointments.\*

2.1.8 All other definitions for terms used in this chapter may be found in 5 CFR Part 351.

\* See 5 CFR 351.501(b) for complete descriptions of Tenure Groups

### 2.2 RIF Planning

2.2.1 Each NASA Center affected by RIF will designate to the Director, Agency Human Resources Division, one individual and an alternate to be the primary interface with the Agency Human Resources Division. This person will provide information necessary to satisfy inquiries both from within NASA and from external sources, as well as to provide a focal point for the flow of information between the Center and the Agency Human Resources Division during the RIF action.

2.2.2 The Director, Agency Human Resources Division, will be advised, prior to the issuance of any notices to employees, when any workforce adjustment is planned that may result in the application of RIF procedures. In addition, as soon as tentative information is available concerning RIF actions, the Center Human Resources Office will furnish information to the Director, Agency Human Resources Division, concerning the potential impact of the RIF action.

### 2.3 Competitive Areas

**2.3.1 General.** This document fulfills the requirement to establish competitive areas for RIF. Areas that combine employees of more than one Center require the endorsement of all affected Centers. If the competitive area includes functions, programs, or employees who report to officials outside the Center (e.g., an employee whose official duty station is at a Center but who is under the administrative authority of a Headquarters organization), appropriate concurrences are required.

**2.3.2 Extent of Area.** The default competitive area shall comprise all NASA employees of a Center within a commuting area who are under the administrative authority of the Center Director. For Headquarters, the default is all NASA Headquarters employees within the same commuting area. When NASA employees within a commuting area are under different administrative authorities, they will be in separate competitive areas even though they may share the same physical location.

**2.3.3 Changes to Area.** Center Directors may request changes to a competitive area, including establishing a competitive area that differs from the default area defined in 2.3.2. The request, which must provide clear evidence of separate administrative authority, must be submitted to the Director, Agency Human Resources Division. Any change that would occur within 90 days of the effective date of a RIF, which requires OPM approval, must be accompanied by documentation to support the rationale and timing of the requested change.

**2.3.4 Publication.** Center Human Resources Offices will ensure that designations of competitive areas, including any changes, are made available for review by all affected employees and OPM.

## **2.4 Commuting Area**

Commuting areas for purposes of determining eligibility for severance pay and discontinued service retirement must be established prior to conducting a RIF. Center Directors must list the activities in each commuting area under the Center's administrative authority and submit the list(s) for review and approval by the Assistant Administrator for Human Capital Management prior to conducting a RIF.

## **2.5 Competitive Levels**

**2.5.1 General.** All NASA positions should be assigned to competitive levels at the time they are classified. Competitive level determinations should be reviewed whenever there is a change in classification (e.g., series and/or grade) or change to the position description (e.g., duties, qualifications, and/or working conditions) that alters the current competitive level assignment. Centers are responsible for ensuring that accurate competitive levels are established and implemented before conducting a RIF.

**2.5.2 Competitive Level Codes.**

**2.5.2.1** All Centers will identify competitive levels using the three character field established in the Federal Personnel Payroll System (FPPS) for this purpose. Centers are free to establish a plan for the assignment of codes that best meets their needs, so long as they ensure it provides for genuine distinctions among different competitive levels.

**2.5.2.2** Centers will send competitive level coding plans to the Agency Human Resources Division for quality review before conducting a RIF.

**2.5.2.3** The competitive level code shall be recorded on the position description cover sheet.

**2.5.3 Competitive Level Definitions.**

**2.5.3.1** Centers must ensure that competitive level rationales are appropriately documented. Where narrative definitions are required, they need not be lengthy, but must specifically identify the key distinguishing features.

**2.5.3.2** A narrative definition is required when:

- a. Positions of the same series and grade with similar duties and knowledge requirements, but with different position descriptions, are assigned to the same competitive level. The narrative description must briefly address why these positions are effectively interchangeable.
- b. Positions of the same series and grade are assigned to different competitive levels. All narrative descriptions must briefly identify the distinguishing features (duties and knowledge required) of the level.
- c. A competitive level consists of a single series, grade, and position number, regardless of the number of incumbents occupying the position.

**2.5.3.3** If the Center elects to use a coding system with intrinsic meaning (i.e., where one or more characters of the code refer to a standardized definition that applies across a spectrum of positions, e.g., supervisory responsibilities), it is not necessary to write individual definitions for each level.

## **2.6 Credit for Performance**

This section establishes the Agency policy on crediting employee performance ratings for RIF retention purposes.

2.6.1 Ratings of record shall be used as the basis for granting additional retention service credit in a RIF. No rating of record shall be issued for the purpose of affecting an employee's retention standing.

2.6.2 In this section, ratings of record and summary level patterns are used as defined in 5 CFR 430.208.

2.6.3 The following types of ratings qualify as ratings of record for RIF purposes:

- a. A performance summary rating assigned at the end of the Agency's appraisal period.
- b. A rating of record that has been assigned following completion of the performance improvement period.

2.6.4 To be creditable for purposes of additional retention service credit, a rating of record must have been approved and issued to the employee, with all appropriate reviews and signatures, and must also be on record in the Center Human Resources Office or other designated official site.

2.6.5 An employee's entitlement to additional retention service credit for performance shall be based on the employee's three most recent ratings of record received during the 4-year period prior to the date of issuance of RIF notices, except as indicated in paragraph 2.6.8.

2.6.6 The Agency must consider an employee's ratings of record earned in a different agency if the rating occurred within the applicable 4-year period.

2.6.7 The additional retention service credit for ratings of record shall be expressed as additional years of service and shall consist of the mathematical average (rounded in the case of a fraction to the next higher whole number) of the employee's applicable ratings of record.

2.6.8 Additional retention service credit for employees who do not have three actual ratings of record during the 4-year period prior to the date of issuance of RIF notices or the 4-year period prior to the cutoff date for ratings of record shall be determined as follows:

- a. An employee who has received at least one but fewer than three previous ratings of record during the 4-year period shall receive credit for performance on the basis of the value of the actual rating(s) of record divided by the number of actual ratings received (and rounded in the case of a fraction to the next higher whole number).
- b. An employee who has not received a rating of record during the 4-year period shall receive credit for performance based on the modal rating. A modal rating is the summary level assigned most frequently among the actual ratings of record that are:

(1) Assigned under the summary level pattern that applies to the employee's official position of record on the date of the RIF.

(2) Given within the employee's competitive area.

(3) On record for the most recently completed appraisal period prior to the date RIF notices are issued or the cutoff date specified prior to the issuance of RIF notices after which no new ratings will be put on record.

2.6.9 Additional service credit will be provided, as follows:

- a. For all performance ratings effective prior to April 30, 2005, the following additional service credit will be provided:

<b>Summary Level Pattern</b>	<b>1 Unacceptable</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 Fully Successful or Equivalent*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5 Outstanding or Equivalent*</b>
A 2	0		12		
B 3	0		12		12
C 3	0		12	12	
D 3	0	0	12		
E 4	0		12	12	12
F 4	0	0	12		12

G 4	0	0	12	12	
H 5	0	0	12	12	12

b. For all performance ratings effective on and after April 30, 2005, the following additional service credit will be provided.

<b>Summary Level Pattern</b>	<b>1 Unacceptable</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 Fully Successful or Equivalent*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5 Outstanding or Equivalent*</b>
A 2	0		12		
B 3	0		12		14
C 3	0		12	12	
D 3	0	0	12		
E 4	0		12	12	14
F 4	0	0	12		14
G 4	0	0	12	12	
H 5	0	0	12	12	14

c. For all performance ratings effective on and after April 30, 2006, the following additional service credit will be provided.

<b>Summary Level Pattern</b>	<b>1 Unacceptable</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 Fully Successful or Equivalent*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5 Outstanding or Equivalent*</b>
A 2	0		12		
B 3	0		12		16
C 3	0		12	12	
D 3	0	0	12		
E 4	0		12	12	16
F 4	0	0	12		16
G 4	0	0	12	12	
H 5	0	0	12	12	16

d. For all performance ratings effective on and after April 30, 2007, the following additional service credit will be provided.

<b>Summary Level Pattern</b>	<b>1 Unacceptable</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3 Fully Successful or Equivalent*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5 Outstanding or Equivalent*</b>

A 2	0		12		
B 3	0		12		20
C 3	0		12	12	
D 3	0	0	12		
E 4	0		12	12	20
F 4	0	0	12		20
G 4	0	0	12	12	
H 5	0	0	12	12	20

\* NASA's adjective ratings beginning May 1, 2005 are "Meets or Exceeds" and "Distinguished," respectively.

e. If at some future time the NASA summary level pattern changes to a 4 level or 5 level system as depicted by patterns E4 or H5 above, then the amount of performance credit granted when there are multiple summary level patterns in the competitive area may be reconsidered.

2.6.11 The Center Human Resources Officer may determine a cutoff date within a competitive area 90 days prior to the issuance of RIF notices after which no new ratings of record will be put on record and used for purposes of additional service credit for performance. When the cutoff date is used, an employee shall receive performance credit for the three most recent ratings of record received during the 4-year period prior to the cutoff date.

## 2.7 Discretionary RIF Policies

Federal regulations authorize agencies discretion in various areas of RIF applicability. The list below reflects NASA's policies in these areas. However, Center Human Resources Officers are authorized to deviate from these policies in any RIF for which they have determined such a change is appropriate. In such cases, the Center's RIF ground rules will clearly document the changed policy.

- a. Vacant positions will not be used to satisfy RIF assignment rights.
- b. Qualifications will not be waived in order to place an employee in a vacant position.
- c. Competing employees will not be allowed to displace employees with lower retention standing in the same subgroup when the Agency cannot make an equally reasonable assignment by displacing an employee in a lower subgroup.
- d. Employees in Tenure Group III will not be allowed to displace other Tenure Group III employees in lower subgroups.
- e. Competing employees in the excepted service will not be afforded assignment rights.
- f. Reemployed annuitants will be terminated prior to a RIF. They will not be competing employees.
- g. Tie-breakers for retention standing will be based on the randomly selected Social Security number process, as defined in Appendix L of OPM's Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, which is available from OPM's website.
- h. When employees compete to remain in their competitive levels, there will be no intervening displacements. When the position being abolished is occupied by an employee who is not at the bottom of the competitive level, the employee occupying the abolished position will be reassigned to the position occupied by the person with the lowest retention standing. However, a Tenure Group I employee may not be placed in a Tenure Group III position if a Tenure Group II position is a valid offer.
- i. When employees compete for assignment into another competitive level and both a vacancy and an occupied position at the same grade level are valid offers, the vacancy will be offered. If more than one vacancy is a valid offer, any vacancy may be offered.
- j. When two or more occupied positions at the same grade level are valid offers, the offer will be made to the position occupied by the individual with the lowest retention standing. However, a Tenure Group I employee may not be placed in a Tenure Group III position if a Tenure Group II position is a valid offer.

## 2.8 Reports of RIF Appeals and Grievances

Each Center is responsible for submitting a separate appeal/grievance report to the Director, Agency Human

Resources Division, for each RIF. The report must include the number of grievances and appeals filed, withdrawn, sustained, denied, pending, and final adjudication. Negative reports are required.

## 2.9 Employee Placement Assistance Program

Each Center affected by RIF will ensure that every reasonable effort will be made to assist adversely affected employees in locating employment. At a minimum, this program shall comply with Federal regulations and NPR 3330.1A, NASA Career Transition Assistance Plan. NASA Centers are authorized to go beyond these requirements, as appropriate, to develop local supplemental programs and initiatives to give displaced employees maximum placement opportunities.

## 2.10 Requests for Voluntary Early Retirement Authority

Center requests for early retirement authorization should be forwarded to the Director, Agency Human Resources Division. Advance contact may be helpful to prepare the package for OPM approval and to determine whether an Agencywide approach is appropriate.

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